39

WORDEATER XXXIX STAFF

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Just as Alfred E. peers from the covers of MAD, the Bunny lays chicken eggs for Aostre, and King Claus ho-ho's down non-existent chimneys -- LOUDmouth McKracken burbles and slurps over the literary fare concocted at JuCo.

A literary muse with a democratic palate, Loudmouth devours all sorts of literature. He chomps hot dogs and escargot, masticates hors d'oeuvres and entrees, sluices down suds and liquers. In a word, Loudmouth pigs out.

The Wordeater staff prepares Loudmouth's repasts by reading submissions, voting for acceptance (majority rule), preparing and distributing Wordeaters four times a year.

Submit poems, stories, cover designs, etc., to John Stobart in C 1069, typing or neat copy required. Manuscripts will not be returned. J. Stobart may decide some awards should be given. For this issue, Nancy Lockhart, poetry, and Michael A. Stillman, prose, shall receive $25 each. Cover designs for this issue were found in a corked bottle floating in Lake JuCo. The $10 for each cover, front and back, usually given for every issue, will be saved on issue #39 and awarded next time.

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R. Walser Yale

ORIGINS OF ART

Everybody is a poet.
So I'm not.
Everybody perceives life
In thier own different light.
So I'm not different.

Everybody has something to say.
Neither do I.
Everybody has an art gallery
In their brain.
So do you.

Some people have leaky brains --
That's all.

****

Ann Ominous

HOW DO YOU LIKE THIS ESSAY
BY EARNEST KIDD?

Conductor
Fucked her.
She was willin'.
Then she took some penicillin.
Couldn't cure the woman tainted,
Got a fever, then she fainted.
As luck would have it, praise the lord,
Father Murphy got on board.
Gave the trollop Extreme Unction,
Saved her soul at Glory Junction,
Which used to be old 4th Street Station,
And that's what happened on
My summer vacation!

****

Judy Belfield

TO WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

I ponder lonely in this chair
An office, sterile, chrome and blue.
But every now and then I stare
At daffodils which laze in view
Before me in a plastic pot ---
They dance, they prance, they frolic not.

Not growing wild beside a lake,
Nor reaching up to kiss a breeze;
No never-ending line they make --
Ten thousand? No -- but six are these.
With trumpets raised, they loudly blare
A fragrance bold which fills the air.

I speak to them of winter's end,
Bemoan these gray and drizzled days --
And each to each they nod and bend,
As though coquettes, averting gaze,
They giggle uncontrollably
Their golden secrets hid from me.

Mark Hulfactor

THE IDEALISTIC WRITER

I put words to paper
to free them from my cluttered mind.
It is the only way to creativity
I think that I can find.
But there is so much to write about
I don't know where to start.
Should words come from the head?
Or should they come from heart?
And I could write with a vengeance
on the problems of our world,
with hopes of being a peacemaker.

But which ideas are significant?
And which events are trivial?
To each his own.
There is usually a clue
With what we have shown.
And have we shown enough?
Have we even done enough?

I could write about numerous empty lives,
their dreams also stolen.
You see it in so many,
reflected in their eyes.
You see they are alone
With their precarious lives,
clinging to another time.
Their lives have no rhyme.
And why are they all alone?

I could change my style
and write humorous lines.
But would everyone laugh?
Would they make better the times?
And how should I begin?

I see them who follow the crowd,
You know the ones that are loud
since they have something to prove.
I could write at them,
But do they read?
They read my words
but would they take heed?

These are but a few
problems that I see,
paths that I will take
to help bring life harmony,
to search for some answers
for all in need,
before we drown in greed.

****

And oft, an empty page begs ink
While yet the flowers glow with life.
And in some future time, I think,
I will recall these posies rife.
But write them now -- I dare not wait
For fear the mem'ry come too late.

****

Judy Belfield

CELEBRATING THE ARTS

I hear the unspoken phrases of the players
on their stages of linen, or melody, or paper --
eloquent soliloquies
that unmask secrets
trapped in fortresses of paint
or notes
or words
and all ugliness ceases suddenly,
suspended in a moment of celebration,
in a moment of almost agonizing intimacy,
when I and the players are joined --
mixed like colors on a grand palette
in some transcendant world
where our separate selves are non-existent in the blend.
And it is said that no such world could be --
but those who say it
have not listened.

****

Cynthia Jane Craig

JUMBLED BEEBOS AND CRAZIES

Jumbled Beebos? Sure if you want to. Maybe it would help if I explained what's going on. No, I guess not. Maybe you'll figure it out as it goes on, but I don't think so.

Smoking the grapevine. Tasting the forbidden fruit. Hide beneath the leaves that grow in around your head. It's like plastic covered sofas in the living room of an antique relative. It's another bite in the apple.

Here's some of the crazies we have to deal with. Can you picture that?

That's why I'm freezing, the damper's open. Oh no! The cloud crashed, cut a hole and step through. Ah yes, I see the Beebos now. They wear red suits and blue suede shoes. "Are Texans really that tall?" "No silly, they're on stilts." Oh I understand.

Blow your mind on stuffed red peppers; no that's right, green ones. My mistake. I'm better now, I pulled my socks up again.

I heard you laugh or did I?

Oh look! I've got a wad of something fuzzy in my hair! Wow, it has blue eyes!

"Pleased to meet you, really. Oh, how's your kids? Barbados? Great. Next Tuesday? Sure, I'll look forward to it, bye."

Lexington, Kentucky? No, Massachusetts. Sounds like a disease. Ducks? Yeah, they're okay.

Francium? Yeah really, kinda rare ya know. "I've heard of it."

"It's after 10." "How do you know?" "The record's over." "Oh, I understand." "Champagne?" "No thanks, I have wine." "Oh, I understand."

Papua, New Guinea sounds nice, at least I think so.

"Beebos back?" "Yeah, jumbled." Count the bricks this time. Five, four, three . . . Good, you're going the right way. Really, I'm only writing. "No, you're asleep." "Oh, I understand." "Is this continued? What page are you on?"

"1,608." "Oh, you mean chapter two."

An empty glass is a sad sight, so are untied shoes. Either one will make you trip.

"Whadja say? Peepers out?"

"Yeah, with Beebos." "Oh, that's good." "Take the plastic off." "I can't, I'm stuck to it." "Oh, I understand." Cats can get comfortable in the strangest positions. Look at him, no feet, just a lump.

"Never hit your mother with a shovel, it'll leave a dull impression on her mind."

"Where'd ja go now? Good, I was getting tired of listening to that any how."

Okay, I'll see ya 'round (or I'll see ya square), that's the weird branch, ignore him, maybe he'll go away.

Pack up the crazies. "Did you give them a drink? It's a long night." Not really, it's only 9:10.

"Whadja say? Peepers out?"

"Yeah, with Beebos." "Oh that's good. I thought I was lost. Clipped nails and painted toes? Sure if you want to.

****

R. Walser Yale

DISCLOSURES
SHADOWS PRAYERS DREAMS AND WORDS

We're just beings
of the 20th century.
Beings that be,
trying to see --
beings like me.
Pulling words from a hat
a little of this,
too much of that.

Fight to write?
Grope for sight?
No street lights
on the edge of night:

Walking the streets
on a dark, frigid night --
a flat, yellow moon
offers its hue
to the damp, ugly and eager sky.

Even in the darkness,
angry gangs of shadows
appear.
You can hear them
in your paranoid footsteps --

Just east of here
about a mile
past those trees,
and borders of stone,
across the misty river flowing
orange vapor lamps burn --

Orange meets yellow
on the east side of town
the horizon tells you
the city is burning down
(but we know it never will).

What is he saying?

Not sure.

Shh! Be still!
Listen quietly
and you'll hear!
Quietly
Quietly whispered
words of love
and words of fear:

Little child's
bedside prayer.
prayers for place
and face,
prayers for wisdom,
and grace --

Is it your will
to stop the disillusions?
Does your will
know peace --
that sweet, rare,
and gentle disease?
Amen.

(continued)

Cynthia Jane Craig

SPACE DUST

"What are we on?"
"The end table."
"How fast can it go?"
"246 mph, unleaded."
"Will we make it there by Friday?"
"Sure, it's only Monday."
"I need a typewriter."
"Why?"
"I have a book to write."
"You'll never make it."
"Why?"
"It's almost Friday."
I waited too long, I should have called earlier, but I didn't think of it. Strange.
"Could you read that part to me?"
"My soul cried out, like the long mournful whistle of the steam train that cut through the drifts of snow on the tracks, headed for Moscow on the Northern Rail."
"Thanks, I needed that."
"Go clean the cat box."
"No, it's your turn."
"Whenja do it last?"
"May."
"I guess you're right, it is my turn."
"Where'd ja put my teeth?"
"In a glass, in the bookcase."
"Well, I guess I don't need them, it's your turn to chew my food anyway."
"What are you doing?"
"Talking to myself."
"Oh? What did you have to say?"
"I don't know. I couldn't hear me."
"Teeth fall out again?"
"Yeth, thith morning."
"Do you have a spare?"
"Yeah, in my trunk."

****

Nancy Lockhart

LOST: HER MARBLES

Marbles dart across
An attic floor,
Frozen little moons of
Memory.
They are broken babies
Dashed against a disinterested
Wall.
Shocked into retreat,
Epileptic eyes rolled
Back to some safer sphere.

****

Disclosures, continued

Sleep for dreams, child,
They are what they seem.
Faraway
Fearsome --
so pleasantly wild.
A lot like death,
an infinite scream.

Forever started
nineteen years ago.
I'd love to see
who is stopping this show.
Where did he go?
Nothing lasts forever,
you know?

I want to leave.
Yes, quickly.

Don't walk.
Run.
You will never reach your destination,
that semi-sweet place
you call home.

Definition
elucidation
rendition
meditation
I really hate them
hate them all

but occasions
seem to call
for more than they want
(I want to be
free)

We can never leave.
Never perceive.

Nothing lasts forever?
Yes it does.
Believe only that
which you see?
Did you see
that my words
are my experience?
Did you see
that my hat was --
my life?

There are too many words here.
Disagree. Never enough.

To understand
in a strange,
foreign land
you need a hand
to hold tight,
the teachers said.

All of those lines
they don't mean a thing.
They're here to confuse,
their own bells to ring --

The poets say:
I can tell you nothing
You don't want to hear.
You know what you know
about love, anger
and fear

(Don't rest on me,
Just something I wrote,
something you're reading)

Is the daydreamer approaching home?
Did they hear his tirade?
Those spectres, and shadows
who
with his mind played?

They only stayed
til he turned around,
he staggers homeward
without a sound

and in his sullen
walk
he found
what is meant
by
"Fight to write."

He found it
on a yellow-orange
night
with a city on fire

self-disclosure.

Isn't that
what it's all about?

Carving borders of stone
he begins to write:

"Writing is wrote to be read
Reading impregnates my head
Reading is writing's fire fed
Writing burns on when I'm dead."

****

Michael A. Stillman

ABIIT AD PLURES

She was dead. She had considered herself to be dead for almost three-quarters of an hour, ever since she had locked the door of her one-room flat and slid the double-bolt into place.

The cloud had been over her for several weeks, dark and ominously low. It blocked the sun, bringing a stifling coldness to her heart and a chalky pallor to her face, making her hair look unnaturally black in contrast. Her grey eyes were glassy and lifeless.

The pain had now reached its terminus. In the beginning, the feeling was warm, a flame in her body and soul, but

(continued)

time had played cruel tricks in a partnership with fate, and when the rush of blood reached her brain the spark had become frozen, not of its own volition but through the whims and vagaries of another creature, corporally made of warm flesh and blood but spiritually cast in cruel molten liquid and wrought-iron steel. This man had extinguished the flame, and the coldness filled her body like a paralysis, and then returned to the heart.

She didn't expect this moment to be so calm. She had always supposed that suicide was a crime of passion, executed by frenzied and unbalanced individuals who had reached the frayed end of their string, and in an instant of flaming irrationality pulled the trigger, or jumped the bridge, or downed the pills. She was surprised to find herself resigned, even tranquil; she accepted her fate. There was neither will nor way to resist the pain that gripped her heart like an Alaskan bear-trap, grinding away her life-blood drop by agonizing drop. Her hour had come, and she could envision no escape.

She was a rational person. She knew that her slowing heart would soon stop its pounding altogether, and wanted to take the most rational course possible. She decided to wait for one hour, time to march through the line of thought one more time, giving death another sixty minutes of the same logic and reason that had guided her life.

Her blank eyes examined the noose, tied in a hangman's knot of heavy-gauge electrical wire and secured to a beam. It was a high ceiling, and she knew that it would do the job. The pain would be irrelevant. She felt that no amount of physical torture could equal the emotional pain that she had already experienced.

A long life isn't so important, she thought. It's a long happy life that's important. When it ceases to be happy, well, there's no reason for it to be long.

She did not want pity. She wanted release. There was no note, for she felt that the catharsis would come only when the pain stopped, and explanation was not only unnecessary, but undeserved.

Trite actions like calling a hotline were out of the question. She did not need their reassuring psychology and false empathy; they would say that suicide was the easy way out, that it offered no solution. Their soothing voices, with all their cool professionalism and pat answers, misunderstood her motives. They had not lived her life. She wasn't doing it because it was a solution She was killing herself because there were no solutions. She considered this to be the difficult way out.

No, she did not pity herself; she pitied those who lacked resolve, the millions out there that didn't have the courage to face death, who stumbled through life groping blindly in the darkness with a sizable chunk of their hearts ripped out. This kind of half-life was not for her. The great majority had convinced themselves that their unhappy lives were almost worth living, and were killing themselves in slower, more painful ways. Who was it, she thought, who had said that nine men in ten were suicides? Franklin? Paine? It did not matter.

She lit a white candle and gazed into the flame, giving it total concentration. Losing herself in its brilliance, she began to spin back through the years, and was greeted by a host of images, faces of people who didn't care. She saw herself reaching out, grasping for feelings that were always denied. Scattered incidents shot through her mind, opening up old scars and rubbing salt in wounds that had been shoved to the back of the brain cicatrices almost forgotten.

The faces in the flame all merged into one; a grinning, mocking death's head. Boldly she looked into its eyes, and was blinded. It was whiter than anything she had ever seen before. Its unearthly iridescence suggested moon-filled clouds, soft pillows on which she could finally find rest. The twelve chimes of midnight echoed empty and alone, with mechanical hands reaching for the sky at twelve o'clock high. As the last echo died the glow expanded to fill the room, pushing out the darkness. The whiteness surrounded her now, seducing her, beckoning with bleached fingers. She climbed into its jaws and felt its hold grow tighter around her pulsating neck. She jumped, and the darkness returned.

****

Maureen Mueller

ANSWERS FROM SANTA

Every year, Santa is deluged with letters he never has time to answer. This year, he is making a valiant effort to keep up with is mail. Below are some of his answers to unusual letters.

(continued)

Answers From Santa, continued

Dear Jane,
Thank you for you nice letter and photo. Also, I'm flattered by your offer, but you're a little too young for me. But I was wondering, who is that older woman to your right in the picture?
Wondering,
Santa

Dear George,
I'm sorry, but I can't give you just part of a bike because you were good just part of the time.
Best Wishes,
Santa

Dear Bradley,
Santa's got lots of interesting things in his pack, but Loni Anderson isn't one of them. Sorry.
Best Regards,
Santa

Dear Susie,
Sorry, Santa doesn't bring Visa or Bank-Americard.
Respectfully,
Santa

Dear Charlie,
I really think you've taken some of the spirit out of Christmas this year when you asked for "cold cash or else."
Yours Truly,
Santa

Dear Mimi,
I'm sorry that the game I brought you last Christmas was defective. Now, please get the Consumer Fraud Div. off my back.
Sincerely,
Santa

Dear Danny,
No matter what you discovered in your yard last year, Santa always curbs his reindeer before leaving the North Pole.
Fondly,
Santa

Dear Jeff,
I'm very sorry, but Santa cannot transport that across state lines.
Cordially,
Santa

Dear Pete,
That was definitely not me you saw kissing your mommy last year, under the mistletoe. Tell your Daddy I don't even own a navy uniform.
Trustfully,
Santa

****

Mark Hulfactor

ANOTHER CHANCE

He glanced at the clock and realized, to his horror, that the hands were moving backwards. Five minutes ago it was 9:30. Now the clock read 9:25 in the p.m.

He blew smoke through the cigarette, and it was getting longer. He was trapped, moving in reverse through the sequence of past actions. Somehow he had missed the warning signs that it would happen.

Usually there is a bright flash in his mind's eye, which causes a moment of heightened perception and awareness.

He turned the pages of the magazine from left to right as he read the print in reverse. "Slaying King in innocence professes Ray Earl James."

The cigarette had reached its full length. He clicked on the lighter, which sucked away its own flame, and then he shook the cigarette back into its packe.

It wasn't real, the doctor had told him. It was grief and a super imagination, meeting to form an unusual syndrome. The medication didn't help at all. Doctors are sometimes helpless to help people, as in this case.

He He put the magazine down and walked backwards to his car. Once at his car, the feeling finally left him, and he drove forward home.

At home it started again as he walked backwards across the room to his closet, hung up his robe, redressed himself in the same shirt and slacks he had worn all day, backed over to the bar and regurgitated a beer he had drunk earlier, until the glass he was holding was full again.

Now if these cycles of time would stay, from present to future, instead of present to past, he could relax. He was exhausted from doing things in reverse all day. He took advantage of being back to normal and went to sleep.

In the morning, he skipped breakfast, as usual, noted that it would soon stop being morning, took a few aspirins, a shower, a cup of coffee and a walk.

The children, the pond, the grass around the pond, the sunlight, almost everything, he hated them.

(continued)

Another Chance, continued

He sat there remembering and hating. If he were on the verge of cracking up, he decided then the thing he wanted most was to plunge ahead into it, not to totter halfway in.

He was watching everything around him. Kids were flying kites on invisible strings, birds pecked at candy wrappers and other garbage cluttered on the concrete. He hated the birds, the kites, the children. Most of all, though, he hated himself.

How does a man undo what has already been done? He doesn't. He may suffer, remember, curse like hell, or forget. Nothing else. That makes the past, good or bad, inescapable.

A woman walked past him. He didn't look up in time to see her face, but she had a good figure, and medium length blonde hair. She was wearing a skirt, which revealed that she had very nice legs.

He half rose from the park bench, when in his mind's eye he saw the bright flash again. The woman walked back before him and he looked down too soon to see her face.

The hell was beginning once more, he realized, as the backward flying birds passed before him.

He gave himself to it. What else could he do? Let it keep him until he was all used up with nothing left.

He waited there on the park bench, watching the fountain suck its water back within itself, the boats racing backwards across the pond, and the birds replacing the candy into its wrapper, bit by bit.

Eventually he rose, and strolled backwards out of the park. On the street, a boy walked back past him whistling some song in reverse.

He backed up the stairs to his apartment, his hangover growing worse again, undrank his coffee, unshowered, and got back into bed feeling awful.

Let this be it, he prayed.

It was dark when he woke up again. He was very drunk. He backed over to the bar and began spitting out his drinks, one by one, into the same glass he had used the night before.

And he grew less and less drunk as this went on. He looked at the clock and it was 9:25 in the p.m.

He continued on back through the evening, undoing things. He sat back down and watched "Leave It To Beaver," from end to beginning. At least, he thought, the stupid show was better backwards like this. The he cried, as kind of a reaction against himself, for thinking of something other than the pain he felt inside.

He was interrupted by the telephone. He raised the receiver, said, "Goodbye" to the boss at work, untalling him that he wouldn't be coming back to work again tomorrow, hung the phone back up, and watched it, for no good reason.

The sun came up in the west and people backed their cars to wherever they were coming from.

This was the longest seizure he had ever had, but he didn't really care. He walked back out the door to take the bottle back to the liquor store to get his money back.

He back-walked to his place and sat down unsmoking a pack of cigarettes. Then came another hangover, and he went to bed.

He was wearing his black suit and undrinking drink after drink as the men were scraping the dirt and clay back onto their shovels, used to undig the grave.

He backed his car to the funeral parlor, parked it, and climbed back into the limousine. They backed all the way to the graveyard. He stood among his friends, listening to the preacher.

The casket was taken back to the hearse, then back to the funeral home. Solemn-faced friends unshook his hand, saying how unsorry they were. Then they left, leaving him alone. The tears ran up his cheeks, as he looked at the casket. He backed home and went to bed to unsleep another night.

The previous evening when he awoke, he knew where he was headed, and what was to come. It was unavoidable.

The past stayed with him that day as he unnegotiated the purchase of the casket. Then he headed home to undrink drink after drink, getting more sober all the time.

He picked the telephone up into his hand and wasn't told in reverse that she wasn't dead. It was an automobile accident. As he paced the floor unsmoking, he knew that she was in the car bleeding, then dying, after the head-on collision. Then alive again? Could she be backing home at 70 mph to reslam the door on their final argument? To unscream at him as she sobbed, and him unscream at her?

Now he realized how much he loved her. How stupid he had been. It had all come back this far. It couldn't end now.

After awhile, he backed into the living room, sat down, and re-waited. Then he heard the car screech into the driveway. He waited in anticipation, his heart beating wildly. He listened for the sound of the car door to reslam. Nothing. What was taking her so long? He glanced at the clock and realized to his horror that time was back to normal.

****

Melissa Wessell

A MOVIE FOR THE BLIND
To Be Heard And Experienced!

I'm sitting here looking out my window (my window, my favorite window). This window is probably my closest friend: it shares my mornings and midnights, and my joys and my sorrows.

The clouds are rolling right before my very eyes, and the sun is sitting wide-eyed behind two rows of golden-edged gray, and behind the tenderest tree branches all cumulo-nimbus.

Now, later, the clouds are stripes of watercolours -- creamy peach topped by lighter-than-slate, and I can say I've seen a purple tree growing right here in the pulse outside my window.

A pink rocket filament shoots off to the sky: a message from the day.

A squirrel and some leaves are climbing up the tree.

Sometimes I sit and stare, watching men in gloves and canes and joggers, children on tricycles zip along the sidewalk.

The blue is pure and the clouds so playful and white, I want to jump into the sky.

Everytime I look out the window, it's a whole new story, and yet there is also familiarity, backdropped and in the foreground.

The world goes by in varying states and speeds; headlights and redlights, and today my dreams are in salmon and milkberry clouds.

I can watch times of day shift subtle moods till now -- when it is blackness, and the house across the street looks as as big as the sky in the dark night.

Tonight the house goes disappearing into space, like it does every night, and its windows are shining ports in a darkness black sky. The windows glow in the great outdoors as the roof sails off to the stars, leaving windows in the night.

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Michael A. Stillman

DRIVING MACHINE

Wouldn't you like to own
A driving machine?
A plush cocoon for you to recline in,
With a sliding ashtray for your cigars,
Shag carpet for your feet,
And imported leather for your ass.
An air-conditioned escape.
You can lock all four doors with one button,
And roll up the windows the same way
In a driving machine.
You can stare straight ahead
With your beady eyes and porky jowls . . .
In a driving machine.
As you take a short-cut thru the seamy side of town
On your way to a two o'clock meeting,
You can ignore the orphan and the urchin
The foreman and the storeman
The mourner on the corner
The banal and the canal
The tramp, the scamp,
The storefront church lamp
The damp food stamp.
None of these dark things filter thru the tinted glass
Of a driving machine.
You don't look at the family of four
Waiting for a pint of sour milk to trickle down.
That family of four is just a statistic to you,
For someone else to worry about.
You've got more important things on your mind
Like prime rates
And plane reservations
And pickled artichokes.

(continued)

Driving Machine, continued

You don't hear the street sounds
As you twiddle the knobs
Of your six-speaker four-channel AM-FM stereo
Tape deck citizen's band radio with flat response
Curve low total harmonic distortion four-ohm impedance
Servo control Dolby direct drive state of the art metal
Tape capability with front-load memory quartz tuning
Electronic solenoid controls fully automatic neon stroboscope
Input, output, and shotput for the ultimate in oxide-free
Linear sound with no cholesterol.
You turn past announcers that say, "Hey there, boys and
Girls guys and gals friends and pals we've got all the hits."
You turn past announcers that say, "Beautiful music for beautiful people.
You turn to a dispassionate voice that says, "Now for the business news."
That's what's important
In a driving machine.
You can scan the panorama of gauges and needles
Spanning the dashboard of the cockpit.
There's climate comfort control taking care of temperature, humidity, and precipitation.
There's cruise control, fuse control, booze control and snooze control.
There's a gauge showing how much blue water is in your windshield wiper tank,
And one showing the driver's blood pressure and pulse rate.
But wait!
You neglected to check the most important gauge!
Yes, the gauge with the red needle pointing to "E".
Time to face reality
Eye to eye
Tooth to truth
Time to open the door of
A driving machine.

****

Melissa Wessell

RAGGAMARINGER

PART I

Lords, how you dream about us, dream of the way you will put your arms around us, and after we surrender, succumbing to your male mating call, you cast us aside in search for another to dream of. We the ladies have a memory you men have never known. Or do you remember kisses in the dark with wistful off-to-sleep dreaming? Reenacting in sleep love tokens? So let's say you don't remember or don't remember with our clarity. What difference does it make? The men I have loved I have loved so hard -- loving aint ever been easy -- and you kiss us once and you walk off dreaming of ladies, of tits and asses, of legs walking by in the shopping center. Not legs that touched you passionately or tenderly but legs of the stranger walking down the street.

PART II

Women clung to him like flies on a sweaty day. One in particular had hands like mating butterflies -- fluttering 'round him like moths chasing shadows in darkness. Some would call him irresistible. With Valentino-like aplomb he leaves them trembling from his touch. And he remains masterful to the end, shedding them with just enough grace to keep them hanging like acrobats in silken shoes.

One woman claims she will hide her heart from the world and never love again. She was stung with a 3 ft. hypodermic and she wonders if she will ever recover from the potent elixir. Just when, she wonders, was the potion delivered? With the first kiss? Before the first kiss? Or lying under a tennis shoe on a cold night in February when she thought she was wishing she wasn't there at all.

Love passes in amongst us like a strange mysterious bedfellow. Like a silent chess partner, who always wins the game but you never quite know how. Or like the person walking by who you never noticed until you heard his footsteps clicking away from you down the pavement. But love is like you have been slapped in the face, challenged to a duel, and you are left standing in the rain and feeling, feeling, always feeling.

(continued)

Raggamaringer, continued

PART III

The day the romance died, it was summer, but I wasn't sitting in a lawn chair. And I took my folded moments and stacked them neatly in a box of long, forgotten childhood past, and I sent them off to the clouds in a balloon on a string. Took a little bit of hurt and nursed it looking at the clouds. The dreams floated off to the sky painfully, but my pain was as shouldered and quiet as an unspoken wish. Insights, realizations, and recollections spun 'round like newsreels; I wanted my shame to blow out secretly: the dying breeze (inside me). No desire for more tortuous feelings or mysterious moments. I wished that I could pick up my boots and jump into the security of the day, that I could pick up the years and throw them away. Can you take me back beyond time and memories, and can I build from this starting today forever sparkling and light?

****

R. Walser Yale

NEVER COMING HOME

We left you back there
In the jungles
In the paddies

Or if we found you
(Before the bugs did)
We'd sweep you into
A baggie

We blew taps
We blew our minds
In the star-spangled
Summer of '69

You weren't heroes
Then
You aren't villains
Now

I suppose it
Doesn't matter
To you
Anyhow.

****

Nancy Lockhart

DIDN'T IT RAIN

The ballgame was called,
The stadium rained-out
That Saturday you washed
And waxed the floor.
Kids were underfoot with
Nothing to do, and your mother-in-law,
The Scourge of Schenectady,
Dropped by to stay a month
Or two.
Picnics died of complications
All over town.
They're still talking about
How Miss America's hair
Went straight as a poker.
Some folks even lost their electric.

Still, you probably oughtn't
Judge the day by the weather.
The sun was out the day they
Started war.

****

Melissa Wessell

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, JOHNNY DOLLAR

There are nights in Chicago where you can walk into a club and you can hear the blues. It's live and it's cheap; doesn't cost a thing to walk in the door.

Harpman's toothless and wearing an old cap, the bassman is old and his instrument looks dusty. They want you to clap, and they know what they know. This aint no honky nose dive: it's the B.L.U.E.S. The place is owned and managed by the Great God of Music, and He sings through their souls.

Oh, Music, you are my child, you are my mother . . . and their hands don't play dusty at all.

But the bar don't look dusty tonight. Golden light-candles on the tables, and and the players some young and the same. Tonight it's blues funk, oh yeah, and it's Birthday Time in the B.L.U.E.S. club.

(continued)

R. Walser Yale

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Child of the 70's
Free and strong
The Age of Aquarius
Been and gone

And spent spending
My days in
Television land
Watching Gilligan
And the war --
Wasn't it grand?

****

Happy Birthday, Johnny Dollar, continued

Band #2 and they didn't even warm up! Just climbed on the stage and started in cold. Soundin' different this moment. Gone went the funk now, and we're the blues, we're strictly the blues. Somewhere along the line they've picked up a couple of white players: the ultimate compliment in this here establishment: to be white and get picked to play. You see, it's the blues . . .

Lead player's smokin' now

On this side of the table are somebody's mother and father, two proud-as-punch and kinda plump, havin' a good time for Johnny Dollar's birthday. A lady's beautiful back just swayed toward the door, down toward the neon signs out in the front, barebacked and bedecked in turquoisey-satiny. And when they laugh it peels so rich.

Jumped into some jazz here so the sax's could show their stuff. Two wavy-headed white guys blowing through your ears.

The lights are golden, no, better than golden, they're so alive you wanna touch -- baked squash and glowing in Venetian dust. Junior Walker, Lefty Dizz, Little Walter Horton, they be all walked up on stage sometime now, and the Great God of Music, he be singin' through their souls.

Crowd claps and nods, half-and-half. It's almost okay to be white, but you better sit respectful afficianado, ' we all know how the blues was made. Just hide along the walls, little white boys, hide along the walls and just stay in your place. 'Cause this here's the B.L.U.E.S, live and in Chicago, and it's somebody's birthday at that.

****

Michael A. Stillman

TATTERS AND CURLS

Teacher says, "You are what you eat,
Four basic groups, you must avoid sweets."
TV says, "You are what you wear,
Buy new clothes, fix up your hair."
Bottled advice poured in a spoon
What's a little girl to do?

"Where's Daddy?" she asks the Mom in the mirror, who
Says, "Absence makes the heart grow fonder," and
Laughs and dabs some "Essence Divine" but
When Mr. Davis visits and affections wander, she
Says, "Out of sight and out of mind."

Babysitter's finger points "Eight hours sleep"
A troubled day breeds nightmares deep
When's Mama gonna get her eight hours rest?
Maybe when baby's at Kindercare West

Adults, hypocrisy, bullshit, lies
It doesn't make sense and she's too old to cry
Too young to find out what maturity means
Too yuung to give up on childhood dreams

Her mind in tatters and her hair in curls
Going down a crooked road in a corkscrewed world
Advice is twisted and role models writhe
Trauma spirals with turmoil inside.

****

Maureen Mueller

TELL ME ANOTHER . . .

He scanned the pages --
Devoured all those
air-brushed
poster-poreless
beauties --
Looked up, winked and said --
"No competition."
It was still nice to hear
one of his
lovingly-told
lies.

****

R. Walser Yale

PRISM WOMEN

Gaze through pretty colors
Through a prism,
Through a rainbow --
Multicolored women
If you prefer

Taking off multi-colored
Garments.
Whispers -- warm purplish
Purrs

Snaking loving arms
Of tenderness
Around your neck
Placing prism glass
Kisses
On your sensitive
Back.

****

Melissa Wessell

ON WILCOX AND RUBY IN JOLIET, ILLINOIS . . .

Put on your mittens,
Pick up your feet,
Walk in this family restaurant
Where you'll find a bite to eat.

Mrs. Santa Claus, white-curled, and pink-cheeked, stands just behind the window with a ladle in her hand. Her apron might be rosebud calico.

Sit down on a chair, let your visage take in the fresh daisy winking at you from the table, and smell homemade soup as it dances 'round the room.

Soon along an elf pops up, tiny white in uniform and coffee in her hand. "Can I help you, please? Thank you."

Mrs. Claus could be your grandmother, or the gram you never had. Rosy cheeks smiling, maybe a smidge of flour sneaked sweetly to her cheek, and it all tastes so grand, and so touched with love.

And the smells surround you warmly, and you feel that you are home, cocoa and warm cookies in your heart. Have a daily Special and you'll see of what I speak: try a tasty morsel, and you'll be filled with love . . . through and through.

****

Nancy Lockhart

THE SUN SINGER

His canescent body merges
With the hoary night.
A silver mist beads upon
His chilled skin, while
His eyes measure the horizon.
His alloy lips give issue
To a secret song, a skyward
Serenade to she who sleep
Beyond the hills.

Shy and comely she dances
Atop the summit
Into the valley of waiting;
Her apron spilling with honey.
Each flower of the glade
Is blessed by her choreography.
With a single kiss she
Approaches the masculine model,
Singeing, soothing, transmuting
His forged form to
To fecund flesh.

****

Len Overcash

THE BOARDER

"Yes you will!" his mother said, her voice loud in the big fragrant kitchen. "If he says . anything about you waking him up, you most certainly will apologize!"

Davy Wilkes looked across the supper table at her, her brown eyes were narrow with anger. He had committed a mortal sin; he had made too much noise coming down the stairs after washing his hands in the bathroom, but apologize to Mr. Bolleg -- never!

I'm trying to keep things together, Davy, but you're not helping me. Not at all." She took a deep breath and brushed the loose strands of brown hair away from her face.

Davy watched her pick at the chicken wing she was eating with her fingers. Her elbows rested on the table, something he never was allowed to do.

"You're not supposed to eat with your elbows on the table, Mother. You tell me that all the time," he sassed.

She stopped eating and gave him that look again.

"You are confined to your room tonight," she said, pronouncing each word slowly and clearly.

Davy dropped his fork on the plastic McDonaldland plate and pushed it all away.

"I wasn't going to allow you to watch television tonight anyway," she continued. "I know you snuck downstairs last night after I fell asleep." She lowered her head to stare at him over her glasses. "You watched one of those damned horror shows didn't you?"

Davy looked directly back and said the magic words. "Dad used to watch em." Then he watched her soften. In her eyes behind the glasses that had slipped low on her nose, was a waivering sheen of tears rising suddenly and threatening to leak out.

This was a trick he had learned from his mother in the first year after his father died. It was her favorite weapon to get him to do whatever she wanted done or not done.

"For Dad . . . Remember, it's what Dad would want you to do . . . If he were alive, Dad would not want you to do that," she would say, the same watery look flowing swiftly into her face.

And it worked so well that Davy began trying it himself, sometimes successfully.

Not tonight, though. The softness dissipated before it could get control.

"Your father was old enough to do what he wanted, Davy, but you are only fourteen. Those old horror movies aren't good for you to watch, you're too impressionable . . ."

"I learn things from them!" Davy said sharply.

(continued)

"you are too impressionable," she continued, glowering at him. "Shows like that will give you nightmares. They're morbid trash and will only distort your mind. And what could you possibly have learned from that junk -- tell me?"

He didn't even try to tell her, because she'd never understand what he had learned about Mr. Bolleg.

"Finish your supper," she told him.

"I'm not hungry," he said.

"Then go on up to your room. And you better be quiet about it."

Davy lay on his back in his disheveled bed watching the sun settle behind the trees, wondering. He was still confused, but no longer felt so powerless. He would defend his house against its enemies once more. Only this enemy was real, not imagined: Mr. Bolleg, the new boarder.

A month ago, immediately after Mr. Greene's sudden death and the first night the advertisement for the vacant room was published in the newspaper, Mr. Bolleg knocked on the front door. He was looking for a room where he could get complete privacy, he had said, and silence throughout the day because he worked from dark to dawn and would be sleeping. He offered to pay substantially more than the ad stated if these two conditions could be met.

Davy formed an instant dislike for the tall, pale man and was sure his mother would never consider the offer. She knew that he played in the house with his friends and to expect them not to make noise was impossible. This house was Davy's castle, his fortress. Within its walls lay unseen skeletons of millions of imagined enemies that he had slain with his cap pistols and plastic machineguns. There was no room for Mr. Bolleg and silence in this house.

But the room was rented to Mr. Bolleg because the extra money was badly needed, and Davy's world began to collapse.

The very minute that Mr. Bolleg moved in, the atmosphere of the house took on a strange chill, becoming more like a damp dungeon than a castle of an unconquerable king, and severe punishments were given for breaking the rule of silence. The house was sealed against him, except for chores and bedtime.

His mother's favorite phrase became, "Be quiet or go outside."

And he did go out. From breakfast to noon, from noon to supper or even dark, he haunted the shadows of nearby oak trees and grassy lots. The sun grew hotter, and the wind died often as the days passed, and there were only so many trees to climb, spiderwebs to drop grasshoppers into, or fireflys to put in empty Mason jars. More and more, Davy did these things alone. His friends, learning of the strict rule of silence, stopped coming over and formed a new gang, from which Davy was excluded.

Davy felt the frustration, the intense and boundless hatred of the powerless. Until last night.

Last night while his mother slept on the couch, he had sneaked downstairs and watched a monster movie on channel 9. Davy had quickly noticed parallels between the man in the cape and Mr. Bolleg. Everything suddenly began falling into place, like a giant jigsaw puzzle. He was shown why Mr. Bolleg worked only at night, never coming downstairs during the daylight hours when the hot summer sun was shining, and what was hidden behind those thin, unsmiling lips.

He learned what Mr. Bolleg's "job" really was.

Best of all, the movie had shown him how to defeat Mr. Bolleg, and he was determined to do it, somehow.

Davy twisted himself into a sitting position, crawling over to the window to look out. Soon Mr. Bolleg would awaken and leave, to stand in the deep shadows of the night, stalking. Davy Wilkes was the only one in the world who knew it.

He wished again, as he did almost every night, that his father was still alive, still here to talk to because he desperately needed to tell someone about all the things that burned inside of him. Trying to talk to his mother usually proved to be useless, all she ever did was scold him for "talking nonsense," or nag him about unfinished chores, but not his dad. Dad would listen and know exactly what to do. In fact, Mr. Bolleg would never have come into this house if Dad hadn't died so suddenly . . . like those people in the movie.

Just then, Davy began to hear muffled noises coming from Mr. Bolleg's room. He had risen!

Davy moved quickly. From under his pillow, he retrieved the pitted crucifix he had found in his mother's jewelry box, then seated himself on the worn oval rug, between the sagging old chair and his bed. Here, the darkness was heaviest, and he could not be easily noticed from the short hallway, but could watch every move Mr. Bolleg made. He hoped that tonight, Mr. Bolleg would, for once, forget to lock the door when he left. Then all Davy needed to do was grab something from the room that would prove to the world what he knew.

The unoiled hinges of the door across the hall protested slightly and Mr. Bolleg was barely visible, a spectral shadow in the unlit hallway. The door reclosed and relocked.

Davy sighed in defeat.

As the boarder moved almost silently down the stairs, he toyed with the cross, wondering if he should confront Mr. Bolleg right now, in this house, before he went out to "work."

(continued)

Rising slowly, Davy crept toward the stairwell, holding the cross outstretched in front of him in case Mr. Bolleg suddenly decided to return to his room.

As he placed his bare foot on the top step, he hesitated. What happened after he showed the cross? Mr. Bolleg would know that he had been discovered and then Davy faced a great danger.

He hurried quickly back to his bed, where, through the open window, he tried to hear the footfalls before they faded away. He had never watched Mr. Bolleg leave, and didn't know the direction the man went, nor, he found out, could he tell by listening.

As Davy thought more about the situation, he realized that he had to get into that locked bedroom, and the only way left was through the single window at the back of the house. Looking around, Davy remembered that Mr. Bolleg's room was on the same side of the house as the old nursery, now used only for storage. They were separated by the bathroom, but connected by the roof of the back porch. He jumped off the bed and crossed the room to the door on the far wall. It was never locked.

Carefully picking his way in the blackness, through the maze of stacked boxes of Christmas decorations, old clothes, and keepsakes, he reached the window. He flipped the latches, tugged at the window, and discovered that it would raise with a little effort.

As quickly as possible, he returned to his room. From the shelf in the closet, he got down a blanket, and arranged the sheet on the bed to give the appearance that he was asleep. Then, from under the mattress, he pulled a narrow, wooden board and a small, rusty hatchet. The doctor in the movie had used a stake, so Davy pulled a loose board from the collapsing shed in the back yard, and chopped one end until it became roughly pointed. He put the crucifix in his pocket.

The window in the storage room was only a slight problem to get open. Beyond it the porch roof sloped easily downward for several feet -- then it ended. Davy hesitated, wondering if there wasn't another way, but knew there wasn't. He began crawling out.

The night had cooled considerably, a slight, persistent breeze drifted steadily through the trees as he inched his cautious way. He stayed as close as possible to the side of the house, not allowing himself to think of the edge of the roof and the sudden open darkness below, or it might magnetically pull him toward it.

After a long, tiresome effort, he reached Mr. Bolleg's window. Strangely, there was no screen, and the window was up an inch. He need only lift it to get inside, but he stopped. Weeks had passed since he'd been in the room, or even glanced into it. Anything could be in there beyond the curtains. He could almost feel the touch of the eyes of some silent monster watching him, and was suddenly and greatly aware of his position; caught between the ominous black muzzle of the window and the deep gaping obscurity of the roof edge. Worst of all, he could not make a quick escape.

Fear took him. As Davy tried to move away from the window, he scraped the skin from the knuckles of his left hand on the rough shingles. Pain and vertigo crept over him.

Davy almost quit, almost tossed the tools over the edge and returned to the safety of his room, but something inside of him made him stay. He knew too much of what Mr. Bolleg was to give up. He must, like the doctor in the movie, be willing to die rather than let this creature continue.

He must go in.

The window slid smoothly open. Davy thrust a foot between the thick curtains, waving it in a slow circle. Nothing touched it. He relaxed, entered cautiously, lowered the window, and squatted on the wooden floor.

The bedroom was cool and filled with a strange musty smell, like the odor of the soil underneath the back porch. As his eyes began to adjust to the darkness, the fuzzy silhouettes aroung the room took recognizable forms and seemed little changed from when Mr. Greene lived here. The small, nicked table stood beside the bed, its tiny lamp still on it. The large blob on the far wall was the chest of drawers, the dresser was next to the locked door. In front of him, occupying much of the room, was the bed.

With the furniture placed, Davy began creeping around the dim room looking for something, but unsure of what that something might be. Tiptoeing toward the dresser, he bumped into an oblong box bulking at the foot of the bed. Davy touched it, felt the sturdy metal clasps that sealed it, the smooth, polished top, and had no doubt about what it was; he recalled seeing one in the movie. The pieces of the puzzle were pulling themselves into place.

Davy continued his search, but soon realized that there was nothing, no unmistakable proof of what he knew. Whatever he hoped to find in Mr. Bolleg's forbidden lair was not out in the open. Except for the box at the foot of the bed.

Standing in front of the dresser, Davy tried to see himself in the mirror. He saw nothing, not even the reflection of the weak light coming in the window. He reached his hand out to touch only wallpaper.

He didn't remember the mirror having been broken. The movie had something

(continued)

about mirrors, but he had dozed and could not recall.

He heard a noise on the stairs and froze. Could Mr. Bolleg be returning so soon?

The next few seconds passed anxiously. If he heard a key in the lock he would have to climb out the window.

The footsteps moved into the bathroom, his mother was preparing for sleep. While he tried to be quiet for the lengthy moments until his mother finished her ritual, sleep began to pester him. Despite the excitement and danger of being in this room, he yawned repeatedly, his eyelids grew heavy. He needed a little rest, just for a minute, so he curled up on the box. Just for a minute.

Davy awoke with a jerk to the rolling barrage of thunder. Fear shocked him -- what time was it? -- where was Mr. Bolleg? He hadn't meant to fall asleep, now he couldn't get back to his own room because of the rain that drummed against the window.

Like a great wave, panic washed over him. All he could do was find a place to hide. But where? He frantically tried to think of a place where he wouldn't be found.

There was only the bed.

He lifted the edge of the cover and felt underneath, flinching when he touched the dustballs. Unless Mr. Bolleg knew that his secret was discovered, Davy would be reasonably secure.

After placing the crucifix directly over his heart and the tools at his left side, he began a fitful sleep, wondering what might happen when the sun rose.

When Davy woke again the room was quiet. The house was quiet, except for the rain running down the drainpipes. He wriggled to stretch the cramped muscles in his legs and lower back. Raining or not, he couldn't stay here any longer. Clutching his tools tightly, he wormed out from under the bed and stood on his stiff legs.

Through the curtains he watched the lightning flash continually acorss the sky, heard the rain tapping the window, and was afraid. Traveling along the porch roof had been bad enough before the storm, but now! His imagination raced, he felt the roof sliding under him as his fingers lost their grip on the soaked shingles, and felt the sudden nothingness beyond the edge.

He hadn't learned enough from that movie, he had trapped himself. Mr. Bolleg might return at any second to catch him. Maybe this all was planned by him, and Davy fell for it!

Then he noticed the form on the bed.

Davy nearly plunged headlong toward the window, only his fear of the wet roof kept him standing beside the bed. He was rooted to the floor until the onset of panic was under control.

He studied Mr. Bolleg as best he could in the murky light. Lying under the sheet, he looked taller, whiter, fragile. There seemed to be nothing to fear from him now. In the movie, before sunrise, the creature returned to his castle where he must spend the day sleeping. They were harmless, he remembered, in the daytime.

Davy listened for the sounds of snoring, heard none, and wondered if any of them breathed at all. He glanced at the curtains, considering throwing them open to let sunlight flood the room, but the storm was blocking the sun and Mr. Bolleg might merely awaken.

That left only one solution to the problem -- the stake!

Over and over in his mind, Davy recalled the movie. Mr. Bolleg never, never came out in the daylight, worked only at night, had never smiled -- never showed his teeth, kept his room locked as if he had something in there that no one else could see. His dad had died mysteriously, like Mr. Greene. His mother was always so strangely tired now -- just like that woman in the movie.

It was all there, easily seen. Davy watched it happen in the late movie and now it was here in his own house!

Davy drew courage from the evidence. He must do what the doctor in the movie had done if he wanted to save his house, and perhaps, even the whole world.

****

Steve Faron

WELL TAUGHT

"Gordey?"
"Yeah."
"This is the Shep."
"Yeah."
"Everything set for tomorrow night?"
"It is."
"Good. Make sure it's done and done right, no foul ups. Got it?"
"Yeah, I got it -- hey!"
"What?"
"You call me again and I'll kill ya."
Click!!

(continued)

I sat down. And I didn't enjoy thinking about tomorrow night. Snake had been a friend of mine since VietNam. In fact, he had saved my life while on reconnaissance patrol. It was during the time of the monsoons. And it was raining like a bitch. Every time I took a step, it reminded me of slamming into one of those sweaty-ass pussy's back in Hanoi. Only the mud felt tighter than what those sluts had to offer. On that day, we hadn't heard anything from Scotty, our lead scout, in more than three minutes. Snake knew something was wrong. I noticed he had taken his .380 Browning automatic out and shoved it in his pants for easy access, cocked, leaving the safety off. I remember seeing him use it once before. He had shot an arm off a Gook as the asshole ran towards him with a bayonet. The Gook laid there, still alive, gurgling something like, "G.I., help me. Help me, G.I." Not the bloodiest or worst I ever saw there. At least not up until what I saw him do next. He walked up to the bastard and said, "Yeah, I'll help ya, I'll help to ease the pain." Snake bent down, smiling as he stepped on the wiggling, bloody vines that once held the arm in place.

"See, they don't move anymore, huh Charlie (Viet Cong)."

"G.I, help me, help me."

"Yeah, sure I will. Honestly I will."

Snake grabbed his Bowie, hopped like a frog over a rock and rammed the blade through the palm of Charlie's hand. It went down to the butt of the grip. I stuffed my ears to block out the squealing sounds of agony. Snake saw me and reassured me with his smile that he was still sane, but I wasn't sure. I read his lips as he looked back down at Charlie. "I'll help you. Relax, man, relax." He then took a phosphorous grenade from his belt, I backed off a ways, not knowing what the crazy bastard would do next, but he told me to watch and learn. He removed the pin and placed the grenade inside the Gook's mouth with the clip pressed up against the top of his bucked teeth. He rushed over to me and said, "I'm gonna be the best."

I didn't understand. Charlie laid there buckling with pain. He finally freed his hand, the knife still in place. The pain was too much, the grenade popped onto his chest when he screamed, "Perfect." Snake was happy. "Keep your eye on the bottom of the flash. Don't miss it Gordey."

Within a few seconds, the grenade exploded and I could feel the heat from the phosphorous.

"The bottom, Gordey -- look at the shadow."

For a split second, I saw the filled-in outline of Charlie's body, then it slowly dispersed and rose into the white mist.

"Have you ever seen anything so damn beautiful?" I remember him saying.

It was more than four minutes now, and Scotty still hadn't reported in. Our Lt. kept us moving without any regard to the situation. The reaching claws of the mangoes almost seemed to prey in on us. We were approaching a clearing when I felt someone grab my arm. It was Snake. "Wait here with me."

We waited for the others to pass. He told me it would be soon. I wanted to go, but I trusted his instincts. He was a killer, I was not.

"When it happens, it'll be from both sides."

I didn't say anything; just listened.

"Do as I do, Gordey and you might stay alive."

He took a couple grenades and he held one each fist. So did I, with pins out.

"Gordey, take the left side, I'll go right. Any second now."

Suddenly, the area was ablaze with gunfire. They hit three of our guys right off. The other five were lying in a ditch unable to return fire. The whistling of combat stopped all at once.

"Good."

"What the fuck you talk'n about, Snake?"

"If there were more than seven or eight V.C.'s on each side, they wouldn't have been able to stop firing at one time."

I began to hear, "G.I. die now -- G.I. die now."

"When you see 'em come out of coverage, throw one grenade at the closest motherfucker and he other one the furthest, but don't stand up. At count five, then rush. Use your M-16 as if you were hosing a car down and scream your ass off, so if you're hit, you won't cry with pain."

Snake was right. Five were on my side, seven on his. They crept toward the ditch chanting, "Time to die, G.I., time to die."

One of the five stood up to fire, but he took a machete through the chest. I heard what must've been his rib cage. Dead instantly.

It was slower now. "G.I., die," they kept repeating it. I was waiting for Snake to give the word. "Wait, wait . . . now!"

I tossed the first, then the second. Charlie looked around, but wasn't suspicious of anything.

The flash burst the area into an oven. I raised my body then rushed in as Snake had told me. My five had to be dead, but I kept going. I glanced at Snake. He had both of his weapons discharging at once. It was quick.

(continued)

Whe had smoked Charlie out of existence. I didn't like killing, but when I saw the expressions of the four guys in the trough, I felt proud of what I had just done. Snake swung his M-16 over his shoulder and replaced the clip in his .380. He walked up to each Gook and shot 'em again. I did the same to the ones I could find.

I remember exchanging phone numbers with him in Frisco as we got off the transport. I kind of felt that I'd see him again, but I wasn't sure when.

Five years passed and I recall being broke. Crime wasn't my bag, but I was starting to think about it when the phone rang. It shocked the shit out of me to find out it was Snake. He had me meet him in a place called Gladys's on 5th and Viszual. It was grand to see 'im. We partied for what seemed a month straight. I asked him what he did for a living and he told me he hadn't changed since VietNam, and only that he received better benefits now. That's when I understood what he said to me close to eight years ago. He offered me a job as his partner and I took it. He taught me mostly everything he knew and then I finally went on my own, doing contracts for organizations like The Shop. It's been close to six years since I've seen 'im, but tomorrow night I'll see 'im again -- probably for the last time. Fuck.

****

R. Walser Yale

BAY WINDOW DREAMS

Sitting in a bay window
Striving for brilliance --
Falling the short
Drop to the hard ground
Outside --

Unsure (as usual)
Why I pursue
This loose, artistic ritual
Of poetic dreams --
Seeing
Realms Unseen.

Is it
It is
Some pseudo-intellectual
Charlatanism --
Pure bullshit on my part.

In hopes that
Lots of pretty girls --
Hard nipple romantics
Will exclaim,
"Oooh, a poet."

I sit by myself --
Waiting.
Busily scribbling Quixote!

So mysterious!

So -- philosophical!
So wise!

Nakedly alone
Ego dropped at my feet
Peering into
The dismal depths
Of lucid reality --
Totally frightening.

Shake the earth?
Confound the heavens?
Spit in the eye of mortality?

It's those troubling times
Of sublime surreality
Spent in no man's land --
Halfway here, yudig?

That I am wakened
By a proverbial thud --
Sprawled on my back
Staring up to the windows
Ledge

With a sudden
Crystalline realization
That -- maybe
I'm not even
Halfway here.

****

Melissa Wessell

I LOOK OUT THIS WINDOW

I look out this window nearly every night. Tonight, I am looking at some very large and bright Christmas lights, and I guess since tonight is November 30, I will be looking at them for 25 some-odd more nights. There is a bright-as-streetlight reflection of colored lights on the shine of the night's rain; it shines brighter than bright lights under cars in the night.

Tonight my house goes disappearing off into space, like it does every night (not my house, I mean, but the house of my nightly visions, across the tonight-

(continued)

it's-colored-street, yes, the house across the street, and its windows are shining bells in a darkness that is the same darkness of sky, and at night the windows depart into the great outdoors, and until tonight when they added the bright lights, the roof sailed off to the stars, leaving windows in the night.)

I want to be feverish about my dreams.

****

M. E.

TODAY I OPENED MY EYES

It hurts
God, how it hurts
When "friends"
Turn your words around
And politely
Use them
To beat you
To the ground.

Hell isn't a place;
It's an ache
When there's
Nothing inside
And no one
Out there
To give a damn.

****

Melissa Wescell

SO MUCH GOES AROUND

So much goes around.

I remember a night
of craziness.
Was it yours,
or mine,
or the sparks
as we flew in the
same room.

****

R. Walser Yale

OUT OF MY MIND

I can't stand
The outer world
Its demands are cold
And straining

While my body is out
And about
My mind is at home
Abstaining.

****

Panda

IN THE DARKNESS, ALONE

I'm so scared,
In my room, all alone,
With the darkness swallowing me.
Pain and death horrify me as they leap
Into the lost corridors of my mind,
Like old friends.
Bad memories fly like black-winged rodents
That search through the maze of my brain,
Trying to locate recall.
Lightning strikes, bold and bright,
While black clouds empty their contents of passion and lust
Intermingled with rain, into my heart.
I don't mind the rain;
It conceals my tears as I descend toward endless sleep.

****

Nancy Lockhart

I MAY RISE BUT I DON'T SHINE

Slices of light
Splice my over-exposed dreams.
Reveille's done too heavily.
I'm not soup yet,
Perhaps I'm wine,
But it's not my time.
Morning is such an embezzler,
So unlike its night time
Sister who comes like a whisper,
A breeze.
Ah, but you morning
Are a disease,
A sneeze that catches me
Without a hanky,
Making me cranky
Till the crack of noon.

****

R. Walser Yale

WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?

What's on your mind?
There has to be more
Than those sounds
Emanating from that
Cavity in your face.

There has to be more,
Even as those sounds
Emanate
There is more

On another level
Saved for who
But yourself
The truth is quite clear

Up in that soft
Pinkish-gray matter
In the lobes and
Crevices
There are banks
Of feelings
You will not share.

Enough of the impotence --
Why don't we just say
Aloud
What we mutter
Under breath when we're
Alone.

****

Nancy Lockhart

ARE WE NOT STOUT AND THICK

Are we not stout and thick
And wholesome?
We who have passed through
Youth's front door
Unable to boast,
Unable to cry.
Have we not men
Who seek our comfort?
Have we not mothers
Who need our aid?
What do we find in
Tarnished mirrors?
Where do we walk
To be
Alone?

****

R. Walser Yale

THE DYNAMICS OF SPEECH

Busy drone of musical words
Or resonating chords,

Sounding in my ears --
Swiftly speaking tongues
Reaffirming existence

Trying so desperately
To mask a growing fear
That nobody is listening.

****

Judy Belfield

OUT AMONG THE STARS

Out among the stars,
through the blackness
of the neverending universe,
through the vast ether regions
that lie between Nether and Bliss,
Thither and Heaven,
and Beyond,
out in the infinite unknown,
past imagining,
past thought and memory and time,
a phantom part of me sails
without direction
or destination.
It drifts invisibly
on great transparent wings --
a formless specter,
gliding vaporously,
thinking and feeling nothing
but a vague contentment,
sensing no presence
and suffering no absence,
gliding without purpose or goal,
existing merely because it is.
And how I long so hopelessly
for it to take me home.

****

Melissa Wessell

between

I think you'll find out as you go
that a lot of people lie to you,
they really do. can't say the whole truth,
so instead you get parcels and pieces,
remnants, withholdings . . .
don't try to understand people, you'll just
get confused
the only one you'll know is you
the only truth you'll know is yours
the only dreams you'll hold your own.

****

Judy Belfield

I AM ONE

I am one
    with the fires of suns,
At the base of me,
    past bone,
    lies the same substance
    that burns in the hearts of stars.
Could it be this
    which turns my longing eye to the night sky?
There is, I like to imagine,
    Wisdom in the cosmos,
    which I have not found within myself
    or in the thoughts of thinkers.
Maybe it is lust for understanding
    which turns my gaze compulsively skyward,
    ever trying to find
    the missing pieces of myself
    in the fires of suns.

****

Melissa Wessell

SUNS HAVE SET

Suns have set since
your footsteps led me looking
for your lost, unforgotten memory.
I see your baggage on the road.
It is almost as if you left
in a hurry, my love.

Chapter upon chapter
in my book entitled "Song"
has been written since those footsteps
were wiped out by another person's feet.

Who says a shoe has a soul?

****

J. D. Guse

CHAIR SKIDDERS

Chair skidders
   Leave streaks on the floor
Like the imprint
   She has left upon my memory.
I feel impressed
   With her presence
And awed
   By her knowledge.
And I feel lost
   As to what to give her.
I have not quite thought
   Of how to
Streak her memory
   With thoughts of me.
But give me time.

****

Connie Van Cleave

FOOTPRINTS

I've seen you only
a few times
yet I know you as surely
as myself.
Not the everyday baubles
tossed awkwardly
to innocent bystanders --
no, the real jewels
I see shining in
your emerald eyes,
faceted to catch the
smallest ray of light
anyone will show to you .
My treasure shines outwardly
from within,
slowly beginning
its journey from
me to you.
Soon you will see --
as I see --
that we are two
that walk the same
lonely stretch of beach.
I'm glad I saw your
    footprints.

****

Maureen Mueller

TOUCH

Fingertips
Touching ever so lightly
Gently circling the whorls of flesh
Redefining love
Sensitive to the secrecy
   of a forbidden encounter
Briefly breaking away the barriers
   that hold back our honesty
Limitations
Erased by the brush of
Fingertips.

****

R. Walser Yale

WHAT IF I TOLD YOU

What
If I
Told you that
I love you girl
Would you believe it?
I think I do
Maybe you
Wouldn't
Though.

****

Connie Van Cleave

THE OLIVE TREE

I only want to ask you
if it really happened.
Did we ever once
see the moonlight
reflecting on each others' face,
our eyes as bright as
the stars that shone
that night?
Did you ever look past my eyes
to see that land of forests
and stars,
the smell of just-washed
mountain air
where Eagles soar
high and free
in that place where your love took me.
A land carved inside
a single, fragile, fleeting tear
when your love moved me
to joy.

Did I ever slowly,
softly, carefully, touch your face
and tell you, "I love you,"
with my whole being
without ever uttering
a single sound?
Once did you try to
catch on film
the me you wished to show the world --
the me behind the
softly curling lashes
and gently smiling face.
And did I ever try to explain
how I knew you were --
and always would be --
my Greek god,
seemingly made of stone,
strong, enduring,
yet smooth, feeling and aware.
I only want to ask you
if this recent stoppage
of time actually took place
or was it just a
figment of my eternity?
If you and I, together,
are just figments -- a trick of will --
then these dreams and memories
(much too grandly crafted
for human conception)
must have been Divinely sent
preparing me for
my Greek god
waiting by
the Olive tree.

****

Nancy Lockhart

IF LOVE IS EASY

If love is easy, if it sails,
If it flies on the gift of grace,
To whom does it belong?
Love born of need is your very own,
A need that drives the heart
Hard against the elements.

Some speak of love in whimsy
And in song, tossing it about
Like a parade flag or a child's ball.
Love is not fragile nor frivolous.
It is the feet of soldiers
Marching relentlessly.
Love is the hunter and seeker,
The voice of night which keeps
Your sleep at bay.
There are secret names for love,
Which are sacrilege to speak.

When love hammers at your door,
You will recognize it as surely
As you recognize pain.
Do not expect love to walk with you
Like a faithful dog, nor sit
By your side like a mourner.

****

Nancy Lockhart

THE SIGH-ENCE OF PAIR-ENCE

We in our we-ness,
A vagina, a penis,
The essence of him and her
As it were
In the beginning.
Oh, oh, genesis
Sum of me, sum of you?

You ejaculate,
I conceive,
While somebody's laughing
Up his sleeve.

Made in his image,
Mirror, mirror on the sky.
We make babies,
But we don't know why.

****

Michael A. Stillman

ALAN IN WONDERLAND
(Sequel to "Extreme Weirdness")

Those eyes. Those amazing eyes. Sometimes it looks like everything's in there; my feelings for her, all the lifetimes we've spent together, all my dreams come true. Breathtaking eyes, eyes that make little things like breathing seem unimportant. Death-braking eyes, eyes that tell me our love will live forever.

Maybe I can get some of these incidents figured out. I'll never forget the time our eyepaths met while she was speaking and I was bombarded with

(continued)

flashes of her past, swept back into her lonely childhood and wild adolescence, like the time she disappeared for five days only to reappear screeching up out of the afternoon sun in an ancient convertible, blazing maroon spray paint over rust, neon over dust, bought with sixty American dollars in Tijuana. The color was the most striking thing about the car, except, of course, the boa constrictor in the back seat, which came with the car as a package deal (reptile and projectile, as her father would later accuse) purchased from an aged stereotypical black-marketeer (cheap hearing-aid in each ear) after much haggling over price. The same tired trader told her how to get over the border without showing registration, although a door-to-door smile and a five-spot would have done the same. Weird, weird, weird, these types of things shooting through my brain like telepathic telegrams, subliminal submarines, between words. We embraced from head to toe and I was hooked.

Finally, I've found someone with whom I can really feel comfortable. I always used to think that I was living in the wrong century, or maybe on the wrong planet. Maybe I'm an intergalactic orphan . . aliens dropped me off on Earth's doorstep with a ribbon tied around my basket. A red satin ribbon, like the one tied around the fresh-cut roses that I tossed into a gas-station trashcan on one of those nights that she stood me up. Maybe some guy came by, wondering what to do that night with his girl, and retrieved them, along with the tickets to the show. I sure hope someone had a good time that weekend.

Maybe she's just playing hard to get. I know we belong together. I wonder if she can feel it? The strongest emotion I've ever felt -- if it's not love then I don't know what love is. That fat little boy in the diaper, that ornery cherub with rosy cheeks, shot me with a flaming arrow and the world's looked different ever since.

I've got to get a better grip on myself, try to pay attention when she talks. I always get too absorbed in her eyes (hypnotize), or the musical cadences of her smiling voice, rising and falling like a celestial symphony, like waterfalls and shooting stars. They say that feelings like these make the world go around, but mine are so strong it goes into fast-spin overdrive. Maybe that's why the time passes so quickly when I'm with her. Talk about obsessed -- she's driving me crazy!

Everybody's got their own kind of insanity tucked away somewhere -- I wonder if she condemns me because I'm honest about mine. I don't want to be a millionaire, I don't want to rule the world, I don't want to hurt anyone. I just want to hold her next to me, where I can feel her heartbeat, synchronize my beat to hers. Mine beats slowly, except when I'm with her it goes fast fast faster -- expanding with each boom until it presses against my lungs and I can't breathe! It's blocking my throat and I can't talk! It's getting bigger and tighter like a balloon about to explode! If it popped would she say it's just hot air?

I know that I'm insane. Is it true that if you know you're insane, then you're really not? That the truly insane always deny it? I think that's a myth. Late on a candle-burning night, when I'm alone with my fears, I can feel it sneaking up behind me. There it goes again. What was that noise? Better put my back to the wall. It's loneliness that gives birth to insanity, don't you know. Oh no. Grabbing, squeezing my brain like a bleeding sponge, punching my ear drums in sledgehammer morse dit dah dit dah dit dah dit kettle drums heating up past the boiling wax into the twilight erogenous zones. Can you hear it? Zip. Zip. ZZZZZZZZZip. Oh no! Just got dressed and we stumbled upon a patch of quicksand! What? The nightstand sank?! The authentic pearls were in the nightstand? In the nightstand? I watched those cement men pour the foundation myself! I was there! They're going to have some warranty work to do, and a lot of explaining! Damn right! Of course they'll pay for the entire cleaning bill! All new clothes! Next time they're going to have trouble in this town! Nex--

Excuse me. Next time I see her I'll pinch her derriere to see if she feels like a dream. Can I believe in her, can I trust her? She already knows some of my secrets. I gave her my love, but she never gave me a receipt. Can I prove it?

If she would just let me know how she feels about me, reality wouldn't be so cold. Does anyone blame me? This world rejects me like a torn dollar bill in the arcade. Is it really that unexcusable for my mind to manufacture a world of its own? If I open up to her, will she use her knee like the others did? If I handed her a bow and arrow and put an apple on my head, would she shoot me and eat the apple? Or would she shoot the apple and use her mouth on me?

Yeah, I see the weather, too, but not on this channel. I can't help it if my hair is on fire! The carpet is moving, it's alive, like the field at Arles. The walls are breathing, they're not walls! I'm in the stomach of some carnivorous beast! My name is not Jonah! How can I get out of here? Maybe I can somehow induce vomiting. Kitchy, Kitchy Koo! The chamber shudders convulsively... Is that what an ulcer

(continued)

looks like? What's this raining from above? It's a sticky, caramel colored liquid. This is a trick. Better taste it to see if it's poison. No! It's my ally, my pal! My buddy, Dr. Pepper! The true king. Vim, vigor, vitality. The world misunderstands both me and my friend. Do I really leave such a bad taste in her mouth? I think this might just be my ticket out of this throb. A bottlecap slides by, and I climb aboard the tin raft. Now I'm being carried through some gleaming red tube, with little hairs, cillia they might be called, moving me along like an over-the-head bucket brigade. I hope they carry me to the fire that I can feel whenever I touch her skin. It's steaming in here -- much hotter than 98.6. Here comes a low tunnel, with a sign above it:

CLEARANCE 3/4 BOTTLE CAP

It's coming up fast. What should I do? ARBADACARBA. No, that didn't work. It's looming up bigger and bigger. Should I dive? Will an arc lead me to an ark? What would you do?

Before I can decide I've already made it through. The hole expanded to allow my passage. I land on a soft bed of down that reminds me of Grandma's house when I was a little kid, and there is no evidence of a bottle cap or acid-digestive fluids. I don't know why, but I feel like I've been sleeping. I stand up and clunk my head on the low ceiling. A faceless voice thunders: "Leave the sleep in your eyes, it may come in handy later." What? There's no light to speak of -- but I feel a draft on my bare shoulder. Does that mean something? Better look it up in my Boy Scout Handbook. Sorry, left my backpack in the nursery. Is reality obsolete? Has it been replaced by this year's model? Where do white elephants go to die?

I find that my head is still swimming and my knees are weak. I pick the leeches off me and take a few reeling steps to my right, where the cool air is coming from (I think). I touch a wall and when it falls away, I find myself in an open field. A fresh wind is blowing from the west, and both suns are setting in their full glory. A friendly unicorn ambles up.

"Are you seeking employment?" he asks.

"No, thank you, I'm on vacation right now. But I appreciate the offer."

"Would you like date with my sister?"

I've never enjoyed blind dates, especially with non-humanoid life forms. However, I was unsure of proper etiquette when dealing with unicorns, and I did not want to insult my sharpened host.

"No thank you, I sort of have a girlfriend in another reality. Besides, I've been through a rather trying ordeal and I have a headache right now."

"I'm sorry. Can I offer you a hemlock-and-tonic to settle your nerves?"

This made me a bit uneasy. I did not want to seem like an unappreciative guest, but I knew that hemlock could not possibly improve my health. Besides, I had no idea what was in the "tonic." I tried a pale lie. "I'd really like to accept, but I'm fasting for my health, by physician's orders."

"So your stomach is in ill health. How are your lungs?"

"My lungs are not in the best of shape, but I've got the heart of a lion."

What a blunder! Unicorns and lions have been mortal enemies for centuries. His eyes glared, his nostrils flared, and he started pawing the ground in rage.

"Choose your weapon, traitor."

Now even if I did carry a weapon, I certainly would not wish to become engaged in a fencing match with a full-grown unicorn. I'm an easygoing Aquarian, and besides, fighting a unicorn is considerably more dangerous than the average barroom brawl. The situation was made more difficult by the fact that he started to issue a challenge, or maybe it was a question, in a language that to this day defies translation.

"Ah Rorie Kray! Ay en a chnacken a bak en a krazen vey vey bey! Eh en a feyie hoe on a kee hee bey. Ah Rorie Kray!"

I countered this as best I could. "Old King Cole was a merrie old soul, and a merrie old soul was he. He called for his pipe, and he called for his bowl, and he called for his fiddlers three."

This confused him. It is gratifying and worthwhile to see a look of befuddlement on a unicorn's face. He stopped pawing a rut in the grass and spoke.

"You know, I don't even know your name."

"You can call me Alan, since you're a friend. What's your handle?"

"Silbee will grab me okay. Do you have any questions?"

"Well, Silbee, my life is full of questions. Maybe your single horn does symbolize Truth, and you can help me find the answers."

He chuckled out of the side of his mouth. "Is that all you wanted? Fire away, oh innocent one."

Things had taken a turn for the better, and this seemed like the opportunity of a lifetime. I spouted off with the cream at the top of my mind. "What is life for in general, and what is my place in it specifically? Does a God exist? If a perfect God exists, why did he create an imperfect Man in his own image? What is the soul? Where does the soul go when it leaves the body? What does it take to get to

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a Heaven? What is Good? What is Evil? What is Truth? What is Justice? What is Beauty? What is Love? Can True Love be found more than once in a lifetime? What is beyond Space? What is beyond Time?"

Not very original perhaps, but how fast could you think with a razor sharp horn inches away from your midsection? Silbee chuckled again in that patronizing way of his, and seemed about to answer all of my questions in a single sentence when he paused as if to reconsider.

"Would you like a cup of coffee?" he offered, with an expression that I took to be a cordial smile.

"That sounds great." I was ready for a pick-me-up of some sort. The existence of coffee led me to believe that I might still be near Earth, my native planet.

"Well, you can help yourself," he said casually. "It's behind that stone over there."

I reached behind the egg-shaped stone indicated by his index hoof and was pleased to find a steaming cup of coffee and a thumb-sized pitcher of cream on a small tray. I added cream, and took a sip. My gracious host was contemplating the Varunic night.

He broke the moonlit silence with a curious question. "What does Varunic mean?"

"It comes from Varuna, the Hindu god of the Cosmos. He was invoked as the night sky in the Vedic period."

"But are you aware that Varuna upheld the rita, the strict order of all things physical and moral? Look at you. Where do you fit in? Do you really believe in your own existence?"

This confused me. Not only did it seem if Silbee knew what I was thinking, but he was thinking several steps ahead of me and laying traps. However, the realization of this fact was of no benefit to me because my puzzling host knew that I knew this as soon as I knew it. I was so confused that I decided to argue.

"Yes, I believe in my own existence. I think, therefore I am."

"Oh, come on. That's illogical dogma. You think, therefore you're a thinker. Prove your existence, then justify it."

"Now wait just a second, mister. You're the mythological creature, therefore it's your burden to prove your existence, not to mention justification. Some of history's greatest thinkers spent their lives trying to justify existence, and how did they succeed?"

He smiled and turned away. "The babble that passes for logic among you nohorns is amusing."

"Well, then why don't you refute it?"

He was about to answer when a lady in white floated through the stardewed meadow. She was wrapped in a silky, translucent material, and carried a large ring of odd-shaped keys at her side. As she passed within ten meters of us she turned her head and smiled serenely, her high cheekbones glowing in the silvery white light.

He was the first to break the silence. "Why don't you follow her?"

"Naw. She never goes anywhere interesting." I feigned experience, feeling flippant and perhaps a little giddy for no apparent reason. I decided to go on the offensive.

"How about telling me a little about yourself? Why does the unicorn symbolize Christ sometimes?

"Well in the first place, young beast without a horn, there no longer exists any creatures called unicorn. Personally, I'm a unihorn.

"Okay, Mr. Silbee, are you willing and able to answer any of the questions that I've asked since we started conversing? Will you continue this evasion? Can you tell me anything about the girl I love?" It seemed like I was asking too much, but Silbee laughed again in maddening condescension, as if I were some type of wandering fool. He seemed about to rattle off an answer when a brilliant green butterfly fluttered by.

"Oh lucky day!" he exclaimed. "I love the lady as much as you do. Hop on my back and she will lead us to all the answers."

How could I disagree? I couldn't have been mounted for more than a split second before he was galloping through the wooded glens and dales of that fresh country. Our quarry was but a speck in the shimmering distance. We did not seem to be catching up, but we certainly were not losing ground. The driving rhythm of Silbee's hooves seemed to demand musical accompaniment. Not having anything better to do at the moment, I decided to sing along with the first rhyme that popped into my head.

The Lion and the Unicorn,
Fighting for the crown;
The Lion beat the Unicorn
All round the town.
Some gave them white bread,
Some gave them brown;
Some gave them plum cake,
And sent them out of town.

Another blunder.

My angered friend threw me with a snort, and I landed on my back in a copse of mulberry bushes a short distance away. I wiped the purple juice off my face and wondered what would happen next.

"You like lions, don't you?" He spat in the dirt as a look of revulsion grabbed his face. "Well, why don't you find one of them to help you, you . . . you . . . human!" This last word was snarled derisively, as if it were a synonym for "vermin." He turned around and

(continued)

Alan In Wonderland, continued

galloped away.

"Please, Silbee, come back! I didn't mean it!" I shouted. "I've hated lions ever since my sister brought a cat home and it scratched me!"

No luck. I found the thicket rather relaxing, so I decided to stay there for a few moments, marshalling my thoughts and resting my weary bones. I couldn't remember ever feeling so tired. I was starting to nod off when the vibrations of an approaching animal made me crawl deeper into the brush. I looked up and was relieved to see Silbee returning.

"All right, young pup, I accept your apology," he said grudgingly.

"I won't mention those beasts again," I said, grateful of his return.

"We might never catch up to the butterfly now."

"What's so special about that butterfly anyway?"

"You mean you don't know?" Apparently he wasn't as omniscient as I thought. "I'm sorry, I forgot you were so human. The emerald butterfly is the girl you love."

Now it was my turn to be surprised. I have often compared the girl of my dreams to a butterfly, for her delicate beauty, for the (End of typewriter ribbon . . . to be continued . . .)

****

Mark Hulfactor

CARRIED AWAY IN A DREAM WITH SECOND THOUGHTS

I saw her walking across the bridge
As I was leaving school.
I thought, "I have to get to know her,"
and remember, just play it cool.

I turned around to follow her
back across the bridge.
I couldn't help but notice her strut.
Oh, it was vintage.

And let me say it now,
I've noticed her before.
I like many of her qualities,
but it's that strut that I adore.

As she glided onward toward her destination
I kept my distance,
dreaming diligently
of our future romance.

We now approached the exits,
so I introduced myself to her.
And as she introduced herself,
I felt my heart astir.

We plunged into a conversation,
not really knowing what to say.
So we engaged in small talk,
we thought it was the only way.

And the better I came to know her
the more my confidence did grow.
So, I did what was expected,
I asked her to the show.

I felt OK when she said yea
to my invitation.
And all through the show I wanted to know
if she shared my adoration.

The relationship progressed, so she finally said yes
to my questioning query.
So then it was known to all
that we were soon to marry.

And after our holy matrimony
we soon learned that we were strangers.
There was no real communicatioon,
which is one of marriage's dangers.

And now we sit with nothing to say
but a mass of meaningless words.
Was I myself? And was she?
Were we just a part of the innocent herd?

So now we both know that we need to grow
after our sacrifice.
But isn't it sad?
While it lasted it was nice.

****

Cynthia Leigh Martin

OUR LOVE DID NOT COME ABOUT

Our love did not come about
because of your need for me.
Nor because of my need for you.
But because of our need for us.

****

Melissa Wessell

UNCERTAINTY DWELLS

Uncertainty dwells
in the corners,
beside the rainbows,
and between the houses.
It
lurks under bridges,
in keyholes,
and behind a breeze.
Uncertainty, however,
possesses no fingers,
so therefore it may grasp
nothing.

****

R. Walser Yale

PRETTY WOMAN

What can I say
Pretty woman
What can I say
To such shameless
Intimidating beauty

That isn't jus another
Line?
(Even that is a
Line.)

In fact -- everything
Has been said before
So I'll either
Pass you by --
Negating you before
I finish the thought

Or cross my fingers
Hoping my approach
Original enough --
Another line
You've never heard

To amuse
Delight
Excite
Turn you on --
I might offend you
(Such are the chances -- one mustake)

Can I present
A clear enough picture
With just endless
Lines?

How can I know
Pretty woman
How can I know you?

****

Maureen Mueller

PRIVATE i

You read me so well . . .
Too well
You know all my moods
(Most times before I do)
Holmes, the master snoop

But Luv . . .
I need my space
Let me decide
when I'll cry
It's O.K.
'Cause I'm not fragile . . .
no china-doll
I'm just me
Blue today.

****

J. D. Guse

SOMEONE I WATCHED

There's a girl over there
Who's combing her hair.
And she bends her head down
As if to see
Her reflection in the waxed floor.
And she looks up
To see if her future is near.
As he walks the old corn-cob gait,
She makes herself look busy
But tries to act the part of never caring.
And he just walks on by.
She flusters
She coughs hard . . .
. . . A last attempt.
No luck.
He already has his future wife.
And this girl that I write of
Is left combing her hair.
And hoping
That the floor's reflection
Does not tell the truth
Of how she'll look
When she's 35.

Just another Mona Lisa in the crowd.

****

M. E.

BLUE EYED FERN

You and I
Are worlds apart
But still I'll try
To touch your heart.

You've been hurt
And you're still healing.
Yes, my love,
I know the feeling.

He didn't deserve you
Needless to say.
Remember we're
Not all that way.

I only want
To see you smile
And entertain you
For awhile.

Your eyes are so pretty
Your smile's so sweet,
Cute as a button
From head to feet.

Precious Fern
With eyes so blue,
I'd do
Anything for you.

****

J. D. Guse

HOPEFUL RESOLUTION #9

I'm confined
   Within a windowed wall
With a blank mind
   And a weary pen in hand.
I get this picture now
   Of eyes with a smile.
A gleaming glinting glory
   Of eyes with a style.
Why can't I catch that smile
   Be in style
Through her eyes
   I see
What I can't be.
   So in her eyes
I capture what I can,
   And hope to God
It's something
   That makes her feel for me
What I've felt for her
   All along.

****

Melissa Wessell

THE COLORS CALL ME

the colors call me:
 and i'm travelling
     to the essence
  of the center of
      center of the
        essence of

****

Maureen Mueller

COMPLEXITIES

You smiled at me --
  I dissolved in the moment,
    But centuries of shyness
    stood between us --
My eyes --
  Fixed on yours,
  A careless move, I thought --
    Half-hypnotized,
    Feeling nameless, faceless --
Your movements were so free, so fluid --
while my body froze on the spot,
Your personality was much too electric,
My psyche was much too delicate --
  I
   crawled
     back
        in
          my
           cocoon
waiting for those feelings to clear,
But they never did --
  Afraid to risk involvement,
    I remained distant,
How foolish --
Damn those inhibitions!

****

Judy Belfield

TELL ME OF THE GENTLE WIND

Tell me of the gentle wind
     which tussled your hair
     and whispered in your ear.
     What did it say that night
          while the stars blinked
          and the moon blushed?

What of the warm sands
     which crept between your toes
     as you stood watching heaven's lights
          play leap-frog on the lake?
     Did you see that single grain sparkling on your foot
          and wonder if it meant as little
          or as much
          as you?

Had I been there,
     I would have built you sandcastles in the darkness,
     that you might have stood princely at their gates,
     and I would have told you
          what the winds sigh to me
               season after season. . .

****

Mark Hulfactor

DREAMING AGAIN?

You may think me old-fashioned
After you've read this,
But I intend to find
A girl with a romantic kiss.

Like in the old-time movies
When romance held the reins.
And there were other classics
Similar to "Citizen Kane."

And I've dreamed of Ginger Rogers
Wishing I were Fred Astaire.
He always got his girl;
Weren't they a romantic pair?

She was so flirtatious
While playing hard to get.
And he was so virtuous
Even before they'd met.

And there was pure chivalry.
Hope someone sees it soon.
What's happened to the gallantry
To inspire another tune?

****

Steve Faron

WISHING IS MEANT FOR THOSE WHO BELIEVE

There is a young man who lives within the bounds of Sunlit Forest, a place where mystical enchantments have been known to occur. His name is Johnny Mumblebee and he refused to believe in any such nonsense.

Everyone in Woodenbury, a nearby town where Johnny worked, knew that one day his disbeliefs would get him into some kind of inescapable trouble. And indeed, they were right.

On his way home from Woodenbury, he decided to take Stoney Path, a short-cut, although he hardly ever used it. In and around, he strolled gayfully playing with the leaves above his head. And as he approached Hickory Creek he thought, "Ah, what a glorious day. I think I'll set myself down upon this bridge." He did so, and enjoyingly sunk his toes into the cool running water. He began to whistle a cheerful tune, when out of nowhere, he heard, "Hey, buddy, you wanna get off my foot!"

Johnny nervously looked around, but saw no one.

"Hey," said the voice again. "I asked you once to get off my foot, or do I have to cast a spell on you?"

Johnny thrilled at the thought of a youngster from town following him and now teasing him, quickly clasped his hands, and let out a full-hearted laugh.

"I warned you," yelped the squeaky voice.

Judy Belfield

I COULD GIVE YOU DREAMS

I could give you dreams
if you would crawl into my words,
for there is an endless supply
of imagination in my ink.
We could travel on star-trains
that lead nowhere,
pulling the stop-cord
every now and then
just to watch galactic crashes
and bathe in the sprinklings of glitterbits.
There are golden ponies
which prance through purple grass
and one has only to free his soul
to see them glistening in the sunlight,
their cornsilk manes rippling in the wind.
There are no goals, no ends,
to chalk up on some sterile chart,
so that one might say,
"I have this
or that,"
"I am this
or that."
It matters in the leastest least,
when last breaths escape,
that gains have been made.
I would sigh into my final sleep
without regret
were I to know
that those silver fantasies
through which I've drifted aimlessly,
joyfully,
might fold themselves into another heart.
I could give you dreams
if you could believe
that my words are not scribblings --
but wings.

****

POW!!!

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! And you, wherever you are, thought that I, Johnny Mumblebee, would believe in spirits, goblins, or whatever they call them."

But when Johnny opened his eyes, he no longer was on the bridge, but at the top of the tallest tree in Sunlit.

"What, what the heck?"

"Are you sorry?"

"Whooo is that?" Johnny said frightfully.'

"Never mind. Tell me you're sorry, and I'll let you down."

"Yes. Yes I'm sorry."

POOF

But not only did this stranger bring him down, he had placed Johnny sitting down in the creek. Wet and furious, he demanded to know who was playing tricks on him.

"Who is it that dares to play games of foolishness with Johnny Mumblebee?"

"Tis no trick, game, nor foolishness. Haven't you ever heard of magic?"

(continued)

"Magic? Hah! No such thing?"

"Oh, but there is, Mr. Mumblebee."

"Yeah, yeah. That's what the town folk have told me. But I have yet to have any belief of it."

"Well, you ought to," said the mysterious voice.

But Johnny didn't pay any attention to the remark. With his clothes soaking wet, he began to shiver at about the same rate as the chattering of his teeth.

"I'm going to catch a deathly cold by the time I make it home, " he thought. "Oh," he grumbled. "If I were only in the comforts of my own home. Oh how I wish it were true."

"I, Fobbie, dancer of the stars and traveller of time, grant to you your wish."

And before Johnny could utter another word, he was in his home wearing the warmth of dry clothes.

"Humh," Johnny wheezed with pleasure. "If only all my wishes came true."

With that, he sprang up out of his chair and pranced erratically back and forth across the shallowness of the room. Itching his head feverishly, he said, "No. It just can't be."

"Boy are you stubborn."

"That voice again."

Speaking with anger and determination, Johnny lashed, "Who is it that follows me home and where are you?"

"My name is Fobbie Throwwell. And I'm right here."

"Where," Johnny said confusingly.

"Here on your shoulder. The other one, the other one."

"Why, you're no taller than the shilling in my pocket. How can you even exist?"

"I see you've found me," Fobbie said with a gesture of coyness.

"Yes, I've found you, and I'm not about to believe in you or you so-called magic, no matter what has happened."

"Now, now, Mr. Mumblebee, there's no need to get excited."

"Excited! Excited? Who's excited?"

"Well, I see my staying here isn't going to change anything. But before I leave, I, Fobbie, grant unto you one wish."

And with that, Fobbie disappeared from Johnny's sight.

Johnny sat for hours thinking about what had just happened to him, but he was unable to reach any positive conclusion. Frustrated and depressed, he then tried to go to sleep, but was too restless to do so. Grudgingly, he rolled over, one, two, maybe three times, and finally spurted out, "I wish I could fall asleep and never wake up again."

THE END

And indeed, he was never to wake up again, for his disbelief cost him his life.

****

J. D. Guse

CHILDHOOD REMEMBRANCE FOR A NEW-FOUND FRIEND

I'll write this song for you
While the morning comes
And the rain keeps fallin'.
Just a word or two
'Bout the clouds of thunder
As Jesus plays trap set
And God's cussin' him out.
And the little men bowl their lanes out.
Wond'rin' if the sky will black out.
Hopin' that the clouds will wander away.

Dhurch bells send the chimes
While the children dress
And they're late for mass.
Headin' from their doors
It's a game they play
As they waltz through H2O
They're just kids don't ya know
Like watchin' out for cracks in sidewalks
The boogie man and tales of beanstalks.
Someday they'll wish the clouds could stay for awhile.

The sirens keep the time
And these city folks
Sleep right on through it. (continued)

Childhood Remembrance, continued

The storm just wakes their minds
As the Holy Ghost
Sings the a cappela tunes,
Folks sit stunned as he croons.
As God dances on your hair with raindrops.
The Holy Ghost knows blues but no pops.
You hope he really tries to sing your song next.

All these dreams are true
But some people here
Say, "No time to ponder."
There isn't much to do
Just wait patiently
'Til the sceneries catch your eyes,
You should watch 'til you cry.
The rain is nice, you should have no doubt.
Pretty soon the sun will come out
Wait a little while and rainbows will shine.

****

Mark Hulfactor

FOLLOWING THE WHEELS OF SPEED

You my friend, independent from society?
You always said that you were.
But how so? You look addicted with anxiety.
In conflict will you concur?
It is true that some things are insidious
If they cause one to digress.

And when shall we possess no fear?
As in all our social inhibitions,
Sometimes it does take some beer
To loosen these binding traditions.
But then we could linger in a haze,
Almost helpless, while we ride the maze.

Entrapped within the wheels of speed,
Oblivious of all danger
Still failing to take heed
You continue to play the hipster
Following the current trend
To your very end.

****

Nancy Lockhart

GO BACK TO YOUR LITTLE ROOM

Go back to your little
Room off the kitchen
In the house of your father.
The hallway of a room
Where you kept your slippers
Under the bed.
The room with a closet of
White shirts, black shoes
And an umbrella.
The room with no mirror,
Just a dimestore picture of
An antique car
That your mother picked out.

Go back to your creaky single
Bed with its faded spread
And remember
That I was the one who
Brought color to your life
The night
I bled on your mattress.

****

Cynthia Jane Craig

CRYSTAL GLAZE

I can look straight at him
And look straight through him
His transparent face
Presents a clear look at the brain.
Grey soft matter
No electrical impulse
Or output.
I can read the chalkboard
Behind him
Just by looking at his face.
You can knock and hear
The hollow echo from inside,
(I have died and sit in state,
on display to be critiqued.)
Someone must have plugged
Him in and pushed start
There's no stopping him now.

****

Judy Belfield

FOR WHOM THE AXE WHACKS

She, like Lizzie B.,
stands momentarily at the stair
and stares at her handiwork,
cups her hand over her mouth,
and, giggling with delicious glee,
descends to the parlor.
Peering through the curtains,
she waits,
hardly able to control her passion
for the sound of footsteps at the door,
though she seems cool and sweet
like water from a spring
to swooning tongues,
to any eye that might be watching.
A frenzied raging
sears her brain
fries her loins --
and she remembers the axe,
carefully hidden in a dark, silent place,
and yearns for the moment
when it shall be raised again
like a dormant spirit,
its blade glimmering in the sunlight
and cracking its way through bone.
She trembles --
she shivers --
as though an arctic gale
had threaded itself through the crumbling plaster
and fingered its way up her spine.
In the parlor,
her spidered eyelashes quivering,
a fevered pulsing in her veins,
she waits for you.

****

Judy Belfield

NEUTRAL GENIUS

Neutral Genius
washes his hands
of wedding bands,
loosens his tie,
gets ready to fly,
but finds he's dropped his fingers
down the sink.
"Alas, poor digits,
I washed thee well. . .
farewell, farewell,"
says he,
"I wish thee well."
With a dryness in his eye,
he blows them all a kiss goodbye,
and heaves a sigh
across the room,
which strikes the gray and jellied gloom,
like shrieks of panic from a tomb,
and shards of feeling threaten doom,
so Neutral Genius grabs a broom
to sweep away
betraying disarray.
"Must be neat and tidy,"
he mumbles pleasantly,
automatically,
his fingerless hands fumbling,
while time keeps tumbling
sideways out the door.

****

Steve Faron

A VOICE THAT BELONGED TO NO ONE

He sits,
staring endlessly at the
nakedness of the wall,
a tear falls
showing feeling
but they say he has none
No one comes
he, he can not go
his body is bound by straps
his life by his own mind,
for he has heard the voice
that belonged to no one.

****

Nancy Lockhart

THE STONE EATER

She ate a stone the
Morning
Her mother never got up
To fix breakfast.
A fist of a stone,
Solid as a secret.
A dead egg
To lodge in some
Barren nest.
Numb as winter.
Silent as eyes.
A man of a stone.

****

J. D. Guse

MY THOUGHTS

My thoughts
Methodically pulse
Into ideas
That fade away too fast.
There's no time
To capture dreams
In written words.
Everything blurs
To obscurity.
It's like a trip
Where you remove
Your prescription
And visualize the beauty
You really can't see.

****

Melissa Wessell

MISCONSTRUED

As I sit
alone and all cried-out,
embers still warm in my heart,
wanting to
Think Through
and Understand,
or take it all away

Somehow

it hurts
even to think about
let's erase the memory bank
hey, it hurts.
My moments were beautiful
and they were mine,
but now they've been
SLAUGHTERED and PROSTITUTED.
Let's take it away.

****

Michael A. Stillman

MEMORIES DANCE
IN THE SHADOWED LIGHT

The warm breeze from the open window
Soothes
Rounding the edges on the corners of my mind
And twisting the page to another time.

Fleeting faces, voices, expressions
Fraying visions that once were friends
What became of him, of her, of them,
Their shadows fleeing between the sky?

Some, perhaps, live nine to five
Bank accounts and mortgages
Exorcising youth like a sickness
Another file in a corporate world.

But others have silver in their eyes,
Moondisc mirrors reflecting light.
They wrestle with demons, griffins, and dreams,
And pause to smile between battles.

Do they recall their long-lost brother,
A fellow traveller on the open road?
They have a friend who welcomes evening,
When memories dance in the shadowed light.

****

Judy Belfield

REDEMPTION

Along the edges
of my essence,
a wilting disease
threatened my soul with decay,
and I was much afraid
that this disease
was widespread over the land,
infecting all with its pus-covered hand,
leaving in its wake,
a million-fold victims,
their putrefaction refracted irridescently
in the merciless sunlight.
Yet, into the stench
of minds rotted
with the putrid odor of disuse,
came a Jesus Christ
bearing invigorating bouquets
that made my head swim,
saving me with an intoxicating fragrance,
so unexpected, so overpowering,
I might have fainted with delight.
As the poison of sterility
drained from my veins,
my eyes opened to the stardust of salvation,
an unruly riot of poetry
bombarded my senses,
and I knew at once
that I should never die.

****

Judy Belfield

ME AND THE DAY AND THE MUSIC

This day's a cliche
made up of words
combined in a too-familiar way,
and even that fresh new sun
is only repeating
a worn-out phrase.
I've heard this song before,
and yet I listen
for a Tom-Robbins metaphor
on a Poor-Richard's-Almanac
morning.
Like the day,
I fear I'm becoming
the last rose of summer,
the frost on the pumpkin --
any numbers
that add up to old --
and there aren't any kangaroos
in my kitchen.

****

Arthur Less

TO JANET AND CHRIS

Two little doves
sitting in the snow
Gentle and Harmless
Will the predators of this world
Eat you
Before you fly away

****

Arthur Less

PERSONAL PHOENIX

The child of light has waited
while dark has had his day
but now they've merged their beings
to tread the middle way

The passage into evil
was an exciting ride
but its bitter fruit's sweet taste
I seek to set aside

To feel the joy of killing
both physical and not
is most exhilarating
but causes souls to rot

While in mindless idealism
a shelter I could find
but to face the world I know
it ill-equips my mind

So here I am at nowhere
from here I'll make my stand
not prophet nor a statesman
Maestro, strike the band.

****

Nancy Lockhart

THE TIME OF HER LIFE

Obese August chased a
September bus, but her
Thighs caught fire in
The running.
Thank Thursday for the
Volunteer Rain Department.
Since then the chubby chronic
Sits on her front porch
Calendar coughing
Golden rod,
Waiting for the wind to
Turn her page.

****

Arthur Less

APOLOGY OF A RAPIST

After all these years
the ghost I fear the most
looks me in the eye

My shame builds to rage
I feel the pressure build
where I will strike out next

How could I be so dumb
to strike at those I love
and try to live it down

I know I will remember
I pray you will forget
that summer of our past

No drugs or time can numb
the shame I did myself
that time so far away

I would it never happened
for now I feel the pain
of lifelong friendship lost

Bridges ever burned
can never be restored
we'll never be the same

I offer no excuse
for that I can't explain
there simply is the tear

****

Michael A. Stillman

COSMIC ARMPIT

May the warm tongue of Creativity
lick between your toes.

We're Amerika's Children,
sprouts of the heartland,
with two hundred years
of political stew
coursing thru our veins:
accept it, reject it, or ignore it.

We're Indoctrination's Children,
splinters of the crossroads,
with two thousand years
of religious mindwash
coursing thru our consciousness:
accept it, reject it, or ignore it.

Time only matters
when you're in prison,
And Space only matters
when you're in the Universe.
? ? ? ? ?
the response is your responsibility

You are an officially sanctioned
Representative of Humanity,
and a bead of sweat in the Cosmic Armpit.

****

Judy Delfield

CHOCOLATE MOONS AND WAX BALLOONS

Chocolate moons
and wax balloons,
too near today's morning --
bright and light --
melt into my coffee cup,
and I am shakened awake
by yesterday's arm.
I close my eyes,
pretend to sleep --
I'm ill-prepared to wander
the shadow-halled palace of sighs.
The days of sugared coffee have all passed,
faded into liquid ghosts
that haunt me with vaporous visions
of chocolate and wax.
I am too weary today,
and so, I will slip into the sepulchers
of departed seasons
to search for wholeness amid the decay --
such whispers there!
fragments of long-dead words
echoing in resurrection
and tightening about my throat --
I cannot think them again!
I am too much pained
by their chains --
forged link by link
into the making of me now,
here in this bright morning,
where I sit before an empty cup --
and on my tongue,
the taste of coffee
and sugar.

****

DRAB REALITIES AND MENTAL WANDERLUST

They asked,
"Why don't you smile?"
so I did,
but they knew,
as well as I,
I wasn't fooling anyone.

Now I wasn't really blue,
I was only being true
to what they expected,
and so I protected the inner me
that wanted to say,
"Go away -- I'm thinking."

They never understand
this need I have to sit and stare,
traveling through my mind
and passing past time
to no certain place,
floating in an infinite space,
as the minutes are clocked
but ignored
until they're irretrievably gone,
until I've reached
the far corners of my imagination
and then forgotten the roads.

They asked,
"Why are you depressed?"
and I shrugged my shoulders,
coming back from worlds
they'd never see,
not wanting to let go,
resenting their meddling,
and feeling somewhat smug.

****

Cynthia Jane Craig

GOLDEN DAYS OF AUTUMN

Golden are the days of autumn,
Stalks of corn at harvesttime
Grapes are plums upon the vine.
The setting sun
At end of day
Stretches long golden fingers
Over wide fields of hay.
Slowly dipping out of sight,
Ushers out day,
Welcomes in night.
Shades of grey, they have met,
The hues of gold
In the eve's sunset.
Dusk descends at end of day,
Like the closing scene
Of a one-act play.

****

Nancy Lockhart

BLACK AS SIN

Shiny carbon fossil
S'pose it's possible
That he can't see
Cause a me?
I put the coal in
My pocket.
Stole it from the
Snowman's socket.

****

Nancy Lockhart

HAIKU

A butterfly Miss
Lited to kiss the pup's nose
Disturbing his nap.

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